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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of three studies on beginning teacher needs and support. The first study investigated what one beginning teacher and her mentor talked about in scheduled talk sessions. Audiotapes of the talk sessions and interviews with the teacher and her mentor uncovered how the beginning teacher perceived teaching and herself as a teacher through talks with her mentor. The four prominent issues that emerged as discussion topics were strategy sharing, facilities, classroom discipline, and fear of appearing incompetent. The second study described Project PRIME (Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining Teachers for Inclusive, Multicultural Environments). The project was designed to increase the number of well-prepared special education teachers in Texas. This study focused on the project's goal of reducing special education teacher attrition by developing a model for professional support. The third study investigated teacher characteristics that were important for success in various types of school districts. Surveys of school personnel officials throughout Texas indicated that there were certain characteristics which could increase the success of new teachers (being child-centered, able to motivate students, consistent, and empathetic). Other characteristics of successful teachers included teamsmanship, willingness to serve, cooperativeness, good interpersonal skills, and flexibility. (Each study contains references.) (SM)

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INCREASING THE SUCCESS OF FIRST YEAR TEACHERS: A SYNTHESIS OF THREE STUDIES

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Review of the Related Literature on Beginning Teachers

The studies presented here arise primarily out of the literature related to the problems and needs of beginning teachers. The discussion of problems faced by beginning teachers is not a new one. They have been chronicled as far back as the work of Smith in 1950 and and Wey in 1951. Unfortunately, little has changed with regard to the nature of problems reported by beginning teachers.

Developmental Phases in Learning to Teach

Fuller's classic study (1969) hypothesized that beginning teachers move through developmental phases, beginning with simple survival to a phase characterized by concern about the impact teaching has on students. Fuller's study has been replicated through many studies (Sitter and Lanier, 1982; Leithwood, 1990; Rutherford and Hall, 1990). Sitter and Lanier (1982) added significance to Fuller's findings by reporting that teachers did move through similar stages of concern, however, they did so in very individualized ways. The ways in which beginning teachers experience various stages of development may be dependent on previous experience and how well the beginning teacher is supported. Rutherford and Hall (1990) also added to Fuller's (1969) study when they found that practicing teachers may take up to five years to move through these stages of concern.

Apprenticeship of Observation

Another perspective which permeates the discussion of teacher development is what Lortie (1975) referred to as the apprenticeship of observation. Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) found that beginning teachers generally claim that student teaching was the most valuable part of their preparation. Unfortunately, Valli (1992) found that often, student teachers simply mimic or copy their cooperating teachers' behavior without investigating the reasons behind their actions. When beginning teachers merely imitate cooperating teachers from their student teaching experiences, they experience difficulty because they have not developed a consistent and internalized philosophy of instruction.

The issue of imitation is complicated by Lortie's proposition that beginning teachers began to learn about teaching when they were five years old. This "prolonged apprenticeship of observation" (1975) can be far more powerful than formal teacher preparation experiences. Carter and Doyle (1995) further suggested that the decision to enter teacher education comes after one has already settled on an image of what it will be like to act as a teacher, based on their experiences as a student.

Collapse of Ideals

Beginning teachers encounter many harsh realities during their first years of teaching and are often forced into situations where they are required to masquerade themselves as experts (Wildmann & Niles, 1989). Cogan (1973) observed that part of what occurs in difficult teaching situations is a regression to safe and more familiar behaviors and attitudes. Veenman (1984) found that students become increasingly idealistic, progressive, or liberal in their attitudes toward education during their preservice training and then shift to opposing and more traditional, conservative, or custodial views as they move into the beginning years of teaching. Veenman's research also found 70% of beginning teachers make concessions in the use of a democratic teaching style as a result of the difficulties which surface in the classroom.

Systemic Problems in Beginning Teaching

Given the complex nature of learning to teach, a structure might be expected to exist within educational cultures to deal with these complexities. Conversely, many schools are structured so that beginning teachers are forced to stick to the dictates of the bureaucracy and to maintain the status quo (Schlechty & Vance, 1983).

Educational systems are built around invalid assumptions about entry into the profession (Hurley, 1989). These assumptions include: 1) that a preservice preparation program with the kind of knowledge and skills to be instantly effective; 2) that it is permissible for beginning teachers to "learn to teach" in the unsupervised environment of their first classroom; 3) that teacher training begins with a university program and ends with certification; 4) large group inservice can provide assistance to teachers struggling with unique problems; and 5) the structured assessment of teachers can, in and of itself, insure quality teaching.

Wildman and Niles (1989) found that beginning teaching assignments are negatively impacted by the educational system when novices are given essentially the same responsibilities as veterans. Furthermore beginning teachers are given some of the most difficult teaching assignments. Odell (1990) reported that beginning teachers are often assigned low ability and disruptive students. Generally veteran teachers are allowed to request and receive the most attractive teaching assignments (Willis & Aver, 1988).

Finally, a discussion of systemic problems would be incomplete without the mention of loneliness and isolation. Sarason (1971) found that "teachers are psychologically alone even though they are in a densely populated setting" (p. 106). Isolation prevents natural induction and can lead to job dissatisfaction and impede professional growth (Little, 1985). Beginning teachers have had little, if any, time to develop peer relationships with other teachers on the campus (Valli, 1992). As well, they are separated from the university where they received their training. Regular supervisory feedback is inconsistent. What is provided generally omit's issues raised in the context of the teacher and the knowledge about learning theory, child development, and curriculum conceptions. (Glickman & Bey, 1990). Rather, feedback provided to beginning teachers places pressure on these novices to conform to the norms and expectations of the school even though they contradict the ideals presented in their teacher preparation (Valli, 1992).

First Study: Teacher Conversations

Description of the Beginning Teacher Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate what a beginning teacher (Elizabeth) and her mentor (Linda) talked about in scheduled talk sessions. The study uncovered how a beginning teacher perceived teaching and herself as a teacher through talks with her mentor.

Methodology

Learning to teach is a complex task. Cogan (1973) stated that development of beginning teachers is context specific and requires an individualized adjustment to the teaching situation. Furthermore, the act of mentoring is context and person specific (Anderson & Shannon, 1988; Clemson, 1987; Galvez-Hjornevik, 1986; Gehreke & Kay, 1984). Mentoring involves highly personal interactions and is conducted under different circumstances in different schools (Wildman et al, 1992). Given the individualized nature of teacher development and the context and person specific nature of mentoring, a single case approach grounded in phenomenology was an appropriate methodology for this investigation.

Phenomenology is located within the Weberian tradition, which emphasizes "verstehen," the

interpretive understanding of human interaction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). A single case approach allows for the thick description of one single subject or a particular event (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). It focuses on a bounded system such as the discussions held between a beginning teacher and her mentor. Only a study of such narrow scope could answer questions such as: 1) What do a mentor and a beginning teacher talk about during scheduled talk sessions? and 2) Are there ways in which talks with the mentor influence the beginning teacher's perceptions of teaching and herself as a teacher?

This case study was conducted over the length of a school year and was comprised of three phases. In the first phase, I conducted entrance open-ended interviews with both the beginning teacher and her mentor. I used these interviews to gather initial points of view from the participants. Questions for this interview included: How do you see yourself as a teacher? How would you define teaching? I audio recorded and transcribed each of these interviews. I shared transcripts along with the emerging themes with the participants in order to encourage reflection and clarification.

In the second phase, I audio taped and observed the scheduled talk sessions between the beginning teacher and the mentor. The tapes were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes. Each week, I gave the transcripts to the participants for reflection and clarification and shared with the participants for purposes of reflection and clarification.

In the final phase of this study, I conducted exit open-ended interviews with these teachers. These interviews used similar guiding questions as those in the initial interviews and attempted to uncover participants' understandings and perceptions of their talk sessions.

Results

Four prominent issues emerged as discussion topics between the beginning teacher and her mentor. They were strategy sharing, facilities, classroom discipline and the fear of appearing incompetent. As a new teacher, Elizabeth was faced with numerous procedures for which she had little to no training. Much of the discussion time between Linda and Elizabeth was spent with Linda explaining various strategies for these procedures. This study found Elizabeth clearly in a survival mode. Linda felt responsible to answer Elizabeth's questions regarding how to get her class under control and how to get each day's job done.

Elizabeth's teaching assignment contributed significantly to her recurring classroom problems. Elizabeth was assigned an especially difficult group of children and a classroom which, formerly, had been a shower facility. One would hope that her assignment was atypical for the district, but research suggests that despite more than 50 years of research on the problems of beginning teachers (see Appendix 1), districts still give beginning teachers the most undesirable and difficult assignments along with the fewest supports (Darling-Hammond, 1990).

Elizabeth's discipline of these particularly difficult children was complicated by her impersonal relationship with them. Nowhere in Elizabeth's experience, had she been exposed to children of low socioeconomic backgrounds or with learning difficulties and behavioral disorders.

The poor accommodations and difficult teaching assignment brought about many difficulties for Elizabeth's first year of teaching and complicated Elizabeth's perception of herself as a teacher. She often confided to Linda, her concern about appearing incompetent in front of other teachers and the principal. Although many of Elizabeth's impressions of herself and teaching had changed by the end of the year, one impression remained constant-the fear of appearing incompetent to other teachers. Her biggest concern at the end of the year was what the other teachers' opinions would be of her students next year. She commented, "That's what you hear, you know. 'Oh, I've got so-in-so's kids and they can't do a thing.' "

The findings also illuminated this beginning teacher's perceptions of teaching and herself as a teacher. Early in the school year, Elizabeth realized that many of the problems she experienced as a first year teacher came from an unrealistic preparation. Although she felt that her student teaching experience was the most valuable part of her preparation, she still felt that she was limited to teaching the class in the same manner as her cooperating teacher. She was never allowed to investigate what worked for her.

As the year progressed, Elizabeth demonstrated what Cogan (1973) observed as a regression to safe and more familiar behaviors and attitudes. As the discipline problems in her class continued, Elizabeth took on a more authoritarian approach in her teaching style. In her exit interview, she stated that she had not related to her students well although it is not clear if Elizabeth understood how she might "relate well" to her future students. Ultimately, Elizabeth's observations in her exit interviews illustrate that she was still struggling to discover who she was as a teacher.

Appendix 1

Problems of Beginning Teachers Over Time

Problem Area	Researcher	Time Span
Feelings of Isolation	Smith, 1950; Valli, 1992	42 years
Problems with Discipline	Wey, 1951; Veenman, 1984	33 years
Difficulty with Classroom Management	Wey, 1951; Stroot, 1999	48 years
Interactions with Other Professionals	Wey, 1951; Wildman, et al, 1989	38 years
Understanding Students' Needs, Interests, and Motivation	Smith, 1950; Houston, et al, 1990	40 years
Difficulty with Teaching Assignment	Wey, 1951; Stroot, 1999	48 years

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Second Study
Project PRIME: Developing a Model for Improving Teacher Retention

Project PRIME (Preparing, Recruiting, and Retaining Teachers for Inclusive, Multicultural Environments) is a project funded by the Texas State Board for Educator Certification to increase the number of well-prepared special education teachers. The major objectives of Project PRIME are:

To increase the number of fully certificated special education teachers in Texas.
To increase the number of special education teachers of color.
To better prepare special education teachers in collaboration, inclusive practices, technology, and diversity.
To make preservice and inservice training for special education teachers more flexible and more accessible through the use of technology.
To reduce special education teacher attrition by developing a model for professional support.

It is this fifth objective that relates to the two studies being discussed. The turnover rate for special education teachers, reaching as high as 30 percent in some areas (Cooley, 1995), is an issue of increasing concern. There appears to be substantially higher attrition rates in special education than in general education (NASDE, 1990; Boe, Bobbitt, and Cook, 1997; Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, and Weber, 1996). It is not very effective to increase the recruitment of educators if we don't take steps to keep them in the profession. There must be a reliable, timely source of information regarding the type of professional support and enhancement that special education staff need and the activities and programs that are effective.

While there are a number of reasons why special education teachers leave the field (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley, Pyecha, Smith-Davis, Murray, and Hendricks, 1995; Brownell and Smith, 1992), one of the greatest appears to be stress and burnout (Banks and Necho, 1990; Frank and McKenzie, 1993; Cross and Billingsley, 1994; Greer and Greer, 1992)). Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) randomly surveyed 1,576 Florida Special Education teachers and found that the factors most related to teacher retention were insufficient certification, high stress, and poor school climate.

Several writers have noted approaches that appear to be effective in addressing burnout in special education teachers. Colley and Yovanoff (1994) identified problems leading to special education teacher attrition and developed specific strategies to address those problems. To address the problems of multiple/competing demands, increasing caseloads, and shrinking resources, they developed stress management/burnout prevention workshops targeting physiological, cognitive, and situational coping skills. To address the problems of collegial isolation and lack of administrative support they developed a peer collaboration program that included training in reflective problem-solving and peer pairs meeting weekly for support. Their study revealed these approaches to be effective.

In 1991, the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, awarded grants to three organizations to describe factors that lead to special education teacher attrition and to develop a strategic plan for schools to increase the retention rates of special education teachers. The results of these projects were reported as being very effective. Wald (1996) reported that strategies developed by these project were grouped into strategies related to state and local levels, strategies related to job design, and strategies for administrators and principals.

A number of other writers have reported on strategies, programs, and activities that have been helpful in retaining special education teachers in the profession (Gonzalez, 1995; Gallagher, 1993; Schnorr, 1994; Whitworth, 1994). Drawing from this rich background, Project PRIME is developing a model that will utilize various strategies and activities in the Professional Support and

Enhancement component of the Recruitment, Preparation, and Retention Model. Among these are:

1) A Teacher-Helping-Teacher network where special education teachers with similar instructional interests and assignments can meet to share ideas and resources;
2) A Resource Bank of college and university faculty members to address specific issues, topics or problems;
3) A faculty exchange program with local colleges and universities;
4) A staff exchange program where school district staff exchange jobs with staff in other types of positions within the district;
5) A mentorship program for new special education teachers;
6) Continuing education programs consisting of workshops and seminars on specific topics as identified through the needs assessment process;
7) A network of model classrooms where special education teachers can see innovative and effective techniques and practices demonstrated;
8) Videotaping effective teaching techniques of local teachers for use during inservice and staff sessions;
9) Training to building principals to better support special education personnel;
10) Stress reduction workshops for teachers;
11) Easy access to needed training using technology;
12) Minigrant programs for teacher designed projects;
13) Disseminate information on local, regional, state, and national sources of funding for classroom projects;
14) Access to staff development resources such as books, journals, and videotapes;
15) Orientation programs for new teachers;
16) A Community Friends program to assist new teachers in locating and orienting to the community;
17) The involvement of local business and community leaders in working with special education staff to provide resources and assist with funding staff development activities;
18) Induction programs for new teachers with continued professional development peer teaching, and an emphasis on assistance rather than evaluation.

Project PRIME is also developing a teacher retention handbook with suggested activities, implementation procedures, and resources needed for various activities and where resources might be obtained. Project staff will also assist in helping school staff access needed resources, and in planning and developing various activities upon request by the school. The training of mentors, development and implementation of the Teachers-Helping -Teachers program, the establishment of peer support groups, development of the network of consultants and model classrooms, and the videotaping of effective strategies will also be accomplished by Project PRIME. Finally, the Project will also evaluate Support and Enhancement activities to determine their effectiveness.

Project PRIME is also establishing a dissemination center of professional books, journals and videos. Information regarding Support and Enhancement activities and resources will be disseminated through regular newsletters, brochures, and through the Project's website. Technology will also be utilized extensively in the Support and Enhancement component of this model. Selected workshops and credit courses will be developed and presented via distance learning to teachers in participating schools. A pilot program to develop one course and teach it through the Internet will be developed and implemented. The use of e-mail will be incorporated as a way of providing specialized consultation to special education teachers regarding teaching strategies, resources, or other issues impacting teacher stress. The peer support groups established will also utilize e-mail as a communication vehicle.

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Third Study
Teacher Characteristics: Preparing Beginning Teachers for Success

It has been estimated that our nation will need two million teachers in the next decade (ASCD, 1999). Secretary of Education Richard Riley has identified this as a top priority for the nation in the coming years (Riley, 1999). Yet, as ASCD notes, "Once high-quality, well-trained teacher find their way into the classroom, the battle is only half-won." (p. 7) We must work to help those teachers to be successful and to retain them in the teaching profession. One of the ways we can do that is to try to help teachers develop those characteristics that will likely increase their success as teachers.

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher characteristics that appear to be important for success in various types of school districts. It is anticipated that this information can be used to provide more effective academic advisement, career counseling, and preservice preparation for prospective teachers, thus increasing their chances for success as they begin their teaching career. The study was a cooperative effort of the Department of Education, the Office of Career Services, and the Statistics Department, and was partially funded by a grant from the American Association of Employment in Education.

During the fall of 1997, a number of discussions took place regarding the characteristics of successful teachers and how college and universities might be able to use that information to better prepare teacher education graduates to be successful in their first teaching experience. It was decided that we would collect information from school personnel officials regarding the characteristics they look for in prospective teachers and the kind of characteristics they perceive as leading to success in a teaching job in their district. We also decided to examine such issues as types and levels of certification to determine if we could provide better academic and career counseling and advising to teacher education students.

Considerable discussions took place as well as extensive reading regarding characteristics identified as contributing to the success of teachers. Based upon these activities a questionnaire was developed to obtain the perceptions of the importance of various types of characteristics to the importance of new teachers.

In January of 1998, the questionnaire was piloted with a group of 40 school personnel officials. Based upon this pilot extensive revisions were made to the instrument and it was distributed to approximately 350 school personnel officials in Texas. The instrument included items on characteristics related to student interaction, group interaction, personal qualities, and preparation. Participants were asked to rank items in terms of importance. Items on the instrument were determined from the literature and also through the pilot study.

Districts were randomly selected and were stratified based on the following categories:

Charter Schools (5, 1.4%)
Independent Town (26, 7.4%)
Major Suburban (21, 6.0%)
Major Urban (3, .9%)
Non-Major Fast Growing (43, 12.3%)
Non-Metro Stable (71, 20.2)
Other Central City Suburban (29, 8.3)
Other Central City (11, 3.1)
Rural (142, 40.5)

These categories are established and defined by the Texas Education Agency and the percentages used in the sample correspond to the percentages represented in the total population of school

districts in Texas.

Instruments were mailed out in the spring of 1998 to school personnel officials at the selected school districts. A follow-up mailing was done in the summer of 1998 and a final mailing in September of 1998. Approximately 236 instruments were returned. A return rate of 67 percent.

There were a number of different types of items represented on the instrument developed for this study. There are four categories of responses regarding teacher characteristics that will be discussed here. Those are: Student Characteristics, Group Characteristics, Personal Characteristics, and Preparation Characteristics.

Results

Table One displays the responses of school personnel officials regarding their perceptions of the most important student interaction characteristics of teachers. As can be seen, "the ability to motivate and inspire" was, by far, perceived to be the most important characteristic for beginning teachers to possess, with 49.2 percent of the respondents listing this as most important. "Child-centeredness" was listed by 30.5 percent of the respondents as being most important, resulting in almost 80 percent of the respondents listing one of these two characteristics as most important.

The second most important characteristic perceived by school personnel officials was pretty evenly distributed among three characteristics, "consistency/fairness," "child-centeredness," and "empathy compassion." The third most important characteristics selected by respondents was "empathy/compassion" identified by 35.2 percent, with "consistency/fairness," "ability to motivate/inspire," and "child-centeredness," running very close to one another.

Table Two describes respondents perceptions regarding important group interaction characteristics of first-year teachers. There appears to be no clear consensus regarding the most important characteristic with 28.8 percent of respondents identifying "teamanship," 21.6 percent "willingness to serve," 18.2 percent selecting "cooperativeness," and "good interpersonal skills" perceived as the most important characteristics by 16.1 percent of the school personnel officials responding.

Although "flexibility" was named as the most important characteristic by 12.7 percent of the respondents, 31.4 percent identified it as the second most important characteristic for new teachers to possess. "Good interpersonal skills" were selected as the third most important characteristic with "cooperativeness" and "teamanship" selected by an identical 21.2 percent.

In the area of Personal Characteristics, Table Three shows that over half (55.1 percent) of the school personnel officials participating in this study perceive "enthusiasm" to be the most important, with "assertiveness" placing a close second at 24.6 percent. Surprisingly, 31.4 percent perceive "good grooming" to be the second most important personal characteristic for new teachers to possess, with 21.2 percent selecting "self-discipline." "Self-discipline," "assertiveness," and "creativity" were all three very close as the third most important characteristic to be possessed by new teachers.

In the area of Preparation Characteristics, perhaps not surprisingly, personnel officials see knowledge of content to be the most important area of preparation, as seen in Table Four by the 41.5 percent of respondents who selected this characteristic. With 17.8 percent selecting this characteristic as second most important it is evident that personnel officials view this as something essential for new teachers to possess.

Also not so surprising, "behavior management" is perceived as an extremely important area of preparation for teachers. Over 67 percent identified it as being one of the top three preparation characteristics for new teachers. Child assessment/development was also viewed as important with

19.1 of the respondents identifying at as the most important preparation area, and almost 55 percent identifying it as either the first, second, or third most important training area.

Other areas seen as somewhat important are "diversity awareness and management," "working with parents," and "collaboration." An emerging area of importance is skill in working with technology. In contrast, "counseling skills," "lesson plan development," and "ethics/school law" were not viewed by school personnel officials as particularly important areas for the preparation of new teachers.

Discussion

It is evident that, as perceived by school personnel officials, that there are certain characteristics that can increase the success of new teachers. Being child-centered and able to motivate students appears to be important characteristics, as are consistency and empathy. Teacher education programs may be well advised to look for these characteristics when recruiting and admitting individuals into teacher education. For those who appear to be low in these areas, sharing this information with students and designing means of helping students to acquire these characteristics would be helpful to their future success as teachers.

In the same way, teamanship, a willingness to serve, cooperativeness, good interpersonal skills and flexibility are also seen as characteristics of successful teachers. These are areas that would lend themselves very well to enhancement through carefully developed activities and experiences in the teacher education program. Likewise, also, enthusiasm, assertiveness and creativity are important characteristics that should be examined in the context of the teacher education program. There are a number of ways that teacher educators can plan activities and experiences to assist prospective teachers in becoming more adept in these areas. For those prospective teachers who still do not exhibit these characteristics sufficiently, teacher education programs may want to team with career services offices to explore ways of assisting students in addressing these characteristics through workshops, simulations, and mentoring.

The teacher preparation characteristics also have important implications for teacher education programs. Insuring that prospective teachers are well-grounded in their subject areas would certainly reflect many of the public perceptions regarding the preparation of teachers and is consistent with the emphasis being placed by many states on teacher competency. Teacher education programs will want, also, to insure that teachers have good skills in behavior management as many school personnel officials have correctly identified this as an area which sinks many a beginning teacher.

References

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